

One of my earliest memories as a kid is from attending a funeral of a neighbor boy I played with. His brother was my age and he was only a few years older than us. He committed suicide by hanging himself in his garage. The most shocking part of it now looking back is after his death my small community did nothing to advocate for suicide prevention or mental health. Flash forward to a little less than a year ago now, a child in my community is pretty much an orphan because his mom killed herself and his dad has alcoholism which is most likely caused by some form of intergenerational trauma. Another story that hits close to home is one of my great uncles, so many times my dad has gone to his house to repair bullet holes in his roof because he had tried taking his own life. When he did take his own life everyone swept it under the rug nobody called it a suicide it was more of a mere accident. One last story that sticks out to me is one of the youth workers from a neighboring tribe, about two years ago he shot himself in the heart and bled out. You would've never thought he or any of the people in the stories I've told would've had any mental health issues. I remember them all being so happy. But it comes time to ask myself what are we not doing in our communities to prevent suicide and make awareness of mental health issues. In my culture we are supposed to be reserved, you only cry during funerals and show little emotion, don't be vulnerable.

What I would advocate for is better overall treatment of mental health across the country but intensively on reservations. Finding a way to integrate our culture and practices with modern day mental health medicine along with strong suicide prevention campaigns. At Unity we have the I will live campaign this is to help teach the youth that their lives matter and are sacred. I hope to revive that campaign on my next term of the executive committee. It may seem like a big task at hand and that it'll take years of hard work to make a difference but if I have learned anything from learning the history of my people it's that we are strong and resilient people.